WINGS.

BY CHARLOTTE P. STETSON.

A sense of wings,
Soft down wings and fair,
Great wings that whistle as they sweep
Along the still gulfs—empty, deep,
Of thin blue air. . . .

Broad wings that beat for many days
Above the land wastes and the water ways;
Beating steadily on and on
Through dark and cold,
Through storms untold,
Till the far sun and Summer land is won.

The New-York Tribune.

ILLUSTRATED SUPPLEMENT.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1899.

A contract between a publisher and an author of the present day is a wondrous document, covering as it does not merely arrangements for publication in one place, but foreign rights, serial rights, rights of translation and goodness knows what else. It is a beautiful document, over which the successful novelist may pardonably gloat. We would not ask him to sacrifice a tithe of his hard earned profits. Except under certain circumstances. "Serial rights" are generally so profitable that an author takes it for granted that they must be put in the contract, no matter what kind of a story he may have written. That way lies abundance of cash, no doubt, but also in that direction lies literary disaster. Mr. Joseph Conrad, for example, is one of the strongest of the new writers. His "Lord Jim" promises to be equal to any of its predecessors. But as it runs through the columns of "Maga" the effect of serial publication upon it is appalling. The beauty and power of the second instalment disappear as if by magic unless the first part is read with it. This casts no reflection on the reader's memory. It simply means that to an author like Mr. Conrad subtlety, atmosphere, mood, are everything, and how can they play their parts when the narrative to which they belong is broken into lengths and published month by month? Serial rights are precious, we admit, but there are times when they seem a curse.

When it was announced some time ago that Mr. Augustine Birrell would address himself in a public discourse to the question, "Is it possible to tell a good book from a bad one?" we ventured to express in this place a doubt as to his saying anything very new or fruitful on the subject. The lecture was delivered the other day before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, and what Mr. Birrell managed to say is thus summarized: "He said it was possible to tell a good book by the discriminative faculty called taste. All critical judgments were subject to two variations—your own humor, taste and idiosyncrasies, and the manners and opinions of your age. The best way to tell a good book from a bad one was to make yourself well acquainted with some of the great literary models." This is all very well and very comforting, like that blessed word Mesopotamia; but we wonder if Mr. Birrell's sense of humor was not a little restless under the burden he put upon it when he set about stating with so much urgency that two and two make four. Over his failure to say anything new, however, we smile in sympathy, not in scorn. After all, when you have referred the inquiring reader, with a solicitude as to his taste, to the great touchstones provided by the classics, whose survival from the past is one eloquent testimony to their greatness, you have done for him all that possibly can be done. And if, as we pointed out only last week, he is born with taste, he will use the old models to good purpose. But if the truth is not in him all the classics in Christendom are useless to the unfortunate man.

An English reviewer treating a new novel by Mr. John Buchan with much friendliness, and praising him cordially, nevertheless expresses the hope that the author's next work will be produced only after due deliberation. "A young author must assimilate life," says this commentator, "as well as portray it. It would be a good rule for young writers not to produce a creative work oftener than once in three years." That is a rule upon the virtues of which we have dwelt again and again with an iteration that we have sometimes feared might become tiresome; yet we feel constrained to give as wide a currency as possible to every restatement of it. The racehorse speed with which fiction gets itself written these days is reflected most flagrantly in matters of style, but the harm goes deeper. Instead of living characters we get soulless puppets, and the mere swiftness of the writing is not to blame; it is the use of ill digested ideas that does the mischief. If the ideas are worthless it is because the author's observation of life is limited and superficial. He lives in a coterie, he thinks with the other members of a clique—if his mental processes may be described as thoughtful—and the older he gets the further away he finds himself from the root of the matter. We would that more of them would learn that the best way in which to improve in art is to forego the exercise of it for long periods, during which one may make those studies of human life which are essential to its proper development.

FARMING.

TWELVE MONTHS ON MR. RIDER HAGGARD'S NORFOLK ESTATE.

A FARMER'S YEAR. Being His Commonplace Book for 1898. By H. Rider Haggard. With Two Maps and Thirty-six Illustrations by G. Leon Little. Octavo, pp. xx, 489. Longmans, Green & Co.

MORE POT-POURRI FROM A SURREY GARDEN. By Mrs. C. W. Earle. Octavo, pp. ix, 463. The Macmillan Company.

In all the long list of his novels—and it is one abounding in entertainment—there is not a book in which Mr. Rider Haggard could feel more pride than he ought to feel in "A Farmer's Year." This is the kind of work that shows that Gilbert White did not write in vain. The author of the famous "Natural History of Selborne" has had many followers, but few have been worthy of him. They have failed through too self-conscious an emulation of his methods. Even so sympathetic and clever an observer as the late Richard Jefferies wrote too much in the vein of the "literary artist" to produce a book of permanent value. Mr. Haggard has gone the right way to work. He is an experienced writing man, but he has put all thought of "art" behind him. His object has been simply to place on paper in readily intelligible form a farmer's experiences and impressions during a single year. So full of matter, so interesting and so unaffected is his journal that we confidently prophesy its ultimate classification with White's book on the shelf where the lover of nature keeps his favorite authors.

Mr. Haggard is careful to state that he has been farming only about three hundred and seventy acres, and that his capital has not exceeded the amount with which such an estate would be worked by a typical landowner or tenant aiming to get a living from the soil. He has not engaged in any costly experiments, nor has he invested heavily in fancy stock. The practical value of his book lies in the representative character of the farm with which it deals. His balance sheet is interesting, just because he has paid at market rates for everything that has reached his table from his farm, because he has endeavored in every possible way to put his land on a thorough business footing. At the end of last year he found that he had made a profit of £122 15s. 4d. In this, however, he reaped the result of the outlay and labor of past years. It had taken some time to strengthen the heart of the rather heavy soil, and his conclusion is not too sanguine. It follows in these words: "One swallow does not make a summer, and one fairly successful year at farming certainly does not prove that this industry can be made remunerative. Still, it does go to confirm me in the opinion—which I think I expressed in the beginning of this book—that, with plenty of capital, inexhaustible patience, real love of the thing and the exercise of about as much general intelligence as would be necessary to move an army corps up the Nile, a moderate rent, an interest on the money invested, and possibly a small living profit, if the labor and other conditions are fairly favorable, and in the absence of any special ill luck or calamity, may still be wrung —— of the land in our Eastern counties."

We turn thus promptly to Mr. Haggard's summing-up because the present interest of his book of course lies less in the charm which is to preserve it indefinitely than in the light which it throws on contemporary agricultural conditions in England. The farmer there is going to the wall. His expenses are heavy, including the rates for the transportation of his produce to the markets. By the time he has reached the buyer his outlay has mounted up to an extent that compels him to charge a higher price than that fixed by his foreign competitors. The English emigrant who takes out a little money to the Argentine Republic gets an immense tract of perfect soil at a ridiculously low figure, raises his crops and his live stock with small outlay and smaller effort, secures transportation to the English market at rates "but little more than those from Liverpool to London"—as we learn from an interesting letter in the appendix to this book—and undersells the farmer in England without making the least sacrifice. On the contrary, he makes an enormous profit in the long run, since he can deal in vast quantities, and small gains on the latter swiftly roll up a grand total. Everything works in his favor. He finds abundance of cheap labor at his doors, where the English farmer, paying every penny that he possibly can afford, is still hard put to it to get competent men, as the laborer is lured away to the great cities by the prospect of higher wages. This exodus from the countryside is one of the worst things which the English farmer has to bear. Mr. Haggard mentions that out of four ploughmen he employed not one was under fifty, and two were between sixty and seventy. The hale and hearty young men go where they can wear black coats, visit the music halls, and, with about double the wages they could get in the country, live like animals in festering tenements, but rejoice in what they are pleased to regard as a more independent life. "Education has done it all," one farmer is quoted as saying, and there is a good deal to be said for his hypothesis. The smattering of book learning that does nothing to teach a young countryman appreciation of the life around him, but fills his mind with vague longings for urban amusements, has certainly done a great deal of harm. But Mr. Haggard is frankly of the opinion that governmental indifference and the fetish of free trade are also at the bottom of the trouble.

Subjected to the pressure of a competition in which his alien opponent has everything arranged to suit him, and he himself gets no privileges at all, he is unable to satisfy the ambition of the young laborer on his farm. He must do the best he can with few employes (and these not always the best), with freight rates rising, with every man's hand seemingly against him. "At eight or nine pence a pound," says Mr. Haggard, "I cannot make butter pay—indeed, it costs more than this to manufacture." And why is butter at so low a figure? Because "provided that the article is pleasant to the eye, agreeable to the taste, and cheap, our public cares nothing for the cleanliness or otherwise of its place of origin," and eats margarine with a light heart. What is the farmer to do? The Government will not help him out. "A deputation," says Mr. Haggard, "waited upon Mr. Chaplin, the President of the Local Government Board, to urge, among other things, the prohibition of the artificial coloring of margarine to resemble or imitate butter, and the prohibition of the mixing of margarine and butter for sale. From Mr. Chaplin they got exceedingly cold comfort. He told them that he had 'heard the arguments of the other side,' and that if this fraudulent coloring—for the object of coloring is fraud—were prohibited it was argued that it would 'practically destroy the trade.' He intimated that whatever might be the rights of the matter, the Government had no time to deal with it." These few notes on the situation show clearly enough against what a terrible load of competition and neglect the English farmer is struggling. Mr. Haggard indicates a state of severe agricultural depression and a shocking diminution of the rural population, both troubles constituting a grave national danger. In his appendix he prints the address delivered on the subject before the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture last May, with the resolution that was then unanimously adopted calling for a Parliamentary inquiry and some governmental action toward the mitigation or removal of the ills now existing in the agricultural districts. If anything is done this book will have had a considerable share in bringing about the reform, for it is full of important information and wise reflections. But we must leave the utilitarian side of the volume and turn to its fascinating qualities as a study of Nature in countless of her aspects.

More than once the author speaks of the pleasures which have repaid him for all his hard work and all his anxieties as a practical farmer. His walks about his property yield him a thousand ever new and delightful experiences. He watches the birds and little animals, the hares and rabbits, as well as his own sheep and cattle. Flowers and trees are his friends. The landscape is always appealing to him, and when he is not picturing the actual scenes before him he is drawing upon his memories of travel in other lands for apposite anecdotes of animals or sketches of nature in one relation or another to man's ceaseless labors. The novel is forgotten in the farmer and nature lover, as we have said, but there are scores of passages in this book which are faultless in their beautiful and sometimes dramatic treatment of interesting themes. There is something even thrilling in the description on page 181 of a wounded hare turning from hated man to meet its fate in the coils of a cobra; the episode of the stoat and the rabbit on page 301 is equally impressive in the manner of its handling by the author, and we have only to turn the page to find him celebrating the death of a foal by its mother's side with the most winning tenderness. He tells many stories concerning the habits of animals and many dealing with the habits of men, the latter being decidedly interesting, since they are drawn from among rural types long identified with the soil. One of these acquaintances of Mr. Haggard was a man who lived for seventy-seven years in the same house, sleeping every night of his life in the same room in which he was born. He would allow nothing to keep him away from home for even a single night, but, when accidents detained him, would go to any expense in order to reach the farm before dawn. There is not a dull page in this book. The author writes with sound sense and with feeling; he has knowledge, humor, sympathy for all things—including the tame toads in his conservatory—and all through his pages we are aware of that joy in the beauty of nature which is not mere æsthetic rapture, but spiritual and reverent. Above all it is a "plain tale," a book that is genuine from cover to cover.

THE END OF A LONG DAY.
(From the painting by George Clausen.)

In sweetness and freshness of feeling, in pure delight in the beauty and mystery of Nature, and in her love for noble literature Mrs. Earle reminds us of the English Elizabeth in her "German garden." Elizabeth is young, and the dame who sits under her vine and fig-tree in Surrey has left youth behind her if we count by years; but we know not which heart is the younger, which mind keener, more interested in life and the works of God and man. In her last pages Mrs. Earle tells us of the debt of gratitude which she owes to her brother-in-law Owen Meredith. "It was due to his friendly advice and his kind encouragement," she says, "that my mind was saved from that sense of failure and disappointment so common—to women, at any rate—in middle life. He taught me how all ages have their advantages and gave me courage to go on learning, even to the end." That life is full of joys at every period when the mind is kept alive and alert is a lesson which this book and its predecessor teach with vivid force. Mrs. Earle lightly ranges from subject to subject in this odd and pleasant mixture of diary and scrapbook; she is soundly, sensibly maternal and housewifely in her talks on children and education and servants, and she even provides a number of recipes for dainty dishes. She has enlightened views on most matters of health and does not ride too vigorously her hobby of vegetarianism. She reads the best books and writes about them with infectious enjoyment; she travels and makes you feel that every new experience means an ever welling spring of interest and enthusiasm for her. All this is agreeable, and agreeably set forth with humor and gentle wisdom and much warmth of heart; but where she is uncommonly winning and a friend of friends is to be entreated most humbly by all flower lovers is in her beautiful English garden. In writing about her plants, relating her experiments and describing her successes and her failures she is at her best, and a very lovable best indeed.